Understanding the Powers of the UN General Assembly vs. the UN Security Council: A Critical Analysis of Peacekeeping and Use of Force

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The United Nations (UN) plays a pivotal role in maintaining international peace and security, primarily through its two most powerful bodies: the General Assembly and the Security Council. While the Security Council has the authority to take binding actions, such as imposing sanctions or authorizing military intervention, the General Assembly serves as a broader forum for diplomatic discussions, offering a platform for all member states to engage in global decision-making. This article explores the key differences between the two bodies, focusing on their respective powers, limitations, and their impact on conflict resolution. In particular, we examine how the veto power held by the Security Council's permanent members can stall decisive action and how the General Assembly can step in through mechanisms like the Uniting for Peace resolution. As global conflicts grow more complex, understanding the relationship between these two bodies is crucial for evaluating the UN's ability to maintain global stability.

Keywords: UN General Assembly, UN Security Council, veto power, peacekeeping, conflict resolution, Uniting for Peace resolution, international security, binding resolutions, diplomatic forum, military intervention, global governance, P5 members, sanctions, use of force, geopolitical tensions, humanitarian intervention.

Introduction

The United Nations (UN), established in 1945 following the devastation of World War II, was designed to promote international cooperation, maintain peace, and prevent future conflicts. It stands as one of the most significant and enduring multilateral organizations in modern history, with a mission centered on conflict resolution, humanitarian assistance, and fostering global stability. Through its various organs and specialized agencies, the UN has played a pivotal role in addressing some of the world's most pressing issues, from peacekeeping operations and mediating disputes to providing aid in times of crisis.

At the heart of the UN's peacekeeping efforts are two central bodies: the UN General Assembly and the UN Security Council. Both play crucial, yet distinctly different roles in maintaining international peace and security. The General Assembly provides a platform for all 193 member states to participate equally in discussions and deliberations on a wide range of global issues, while the Security Council, with its unique structure and powers, holds the primary responsibility for making binding decisions, including the use of military force when necessary to resolve conflicts.

Understanding the structural differences between the UN General Assembly and the UN Security Council is critical for grasping how the UN functions in practice, especially regarding peace and conflict resolution. The General Assembly, often seen as the deliberative body, can only make recommendations, while the Security Council, through its Chapter VII powers, can authorize sanctions, military interventions, and peacekeeping missions that have legal and binding authority on member states. This difference not only defines the operational scope of each body but also highlights the potential for paralysis in conflict situations, particularly when permanent members of the Security Council exercise their veto powers to block action.

In modern conflicts, where geopolitical tensions and alliances often impede decisive action, this distinction becomes increasingly relevant. For instance, in situations like the ongoing wars in Syria or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Security Council's ability to act can be stymied by the vetoes of its permanent members, while the General Assembly, despite broad international support, lacks the legal authority to enforce peace. This has led to growing frustration and

debate over whether the structure of the UN, particularly the imbalance of power between these two bodies, is adequate to address the complexities of today's global conflicts.

As calls for reform grow louder, particularly in cases where the UN's ability to prevent violence is hindered, examining the roles of the General Assembly and the Security Council is essential for understanding the limitations and possibilities of international intervention. This article seeks to explore these structural differences, their historical and legal foundations, and their implications for peacekeeping in the context of modern conflicts, such as the recent calls for intervention in Gaza.

The Role and Structure of the UN General Assembly

Composition

The UN General Assembly is the most inclusive body within the United Nations, composed of representatives from all 193 member states. Unlike the UN Security Council, where only 15 members serve at any given time, the General Assembly ensures that every member state, regardless of size or global influence, has an equal voice in the decision-making process. Each country is given one vote, regardless of population or geopolitical power, reflecting the principle of sovereign equality. This democratic structure allows the General Assembly to function as a global forum where nations of all sizes and regions can come together to discuss and address international concerns.

Function

As a deliberative body, the General Assembly serves as the primary forum for global discussion on a wide range of issues affecting the international community. These issues include:

- Peace and security: While the General Assembly lacks the binding authority to enforce military or security actions, it plays a crucial role in raising awareness and fostering dialogue on conflicts and security matters across the globe.

- Human rights: The General Assembly often addresses human rights violations, providing a platform for resolutions condemning abuses, endorsing human rights treaties, and encouraging member states to improve their records.
- Development and economic issues: The body also tackles development initiatives, poverty reduction, and international cooperation in areas such as education, public health, and infrastructure.
- Environmental sustainability: Climate change and environmental protection have become central topics within the General Assembly's agenda, as countries work together on global accords like the Paris Agreement to address pressing environmental concerns.

Importantly, the General Assembly is responsible for approving the UN budget, including the allocation of funds for various programs and initiatives, and electing members to other important UN organs such as the Security Council, International Court of Justice, and various committees. This wide-reaching mandate gives the Assembly a vital role in shaping the overall direction of the UN.

Powers and Limitations

Despite its central role in global discussions, the General Assembly's powers are limited. Unlike the UN Security Council, the resolutions and decisions made by the General Assembly are not legally binding on member states. The Assembly can adopt recommendations, but these recommendations do not carry the same enforcement power as Security Council resolutions. This limits the General Assembly's ability to directly influence peacekeeping and security measures or compel action from member states.

However, the General Assembly's influence should not be underestimated. Through its moral authority and broad membership, it can exert significant pressure on nations by highlighting human rights abuses, drawing attention to international crises, and calling for collective actions or sanctions. The General Assembly's ability to mobilize global opinion and consensus is one of its most valuable tools, particularly when the Security Council is paralyzed by vetoes or internal disagreements.

The 'Uniting for Peace' Resolution (1950)

The Uniting for Peace resolution (Resolution 377 A), adopted in 1950, represents a rare instance where the General Assembly can make recommendations for collective action, including the potential use of force. This resolution was introduced in response to the Korean War, when the Security Council was unable to take action due to a Soviet veto. Under this resolution, the General Assembly can step in when the Security Council is deadlocked and unable to fulfill its responsibilities in maintaining international peace and security.

The resolution allows the General Assembly to call for emergency special sessions where member states can recommend collective measures—such as economic sanctions or military interventions—to restore peace. However, these recommendations are still non-binding, and their implementation depends on the willingness of member states to act on them. The General Assembly does not have the legal authority to compel states to use force or intervene militarily; instead, it relies on the political and diplomatic consensus of the international community.

While the Uniting for Peace resolution has only been invoked a few times, it highlights the potential for the General Assembly to play a larger role in conflict resolution when the Security Council is hampered by the veto power of its permanent members. Nevertheless, the use of this resolution is limited in scope and frequency, reflecting the General Assembly's overall limitations in matters of military intervention and enforcement.

In conclusion, the UN General Assembly plays an indispensable role as a forum for global diplomacy and international cooperation. However, its ability to influence peacekeeping and the use of force is constrained by its lack of binding authority. Through mechanisms like the Uniting for Peace resolution, the General Assembly can still influence collective action, but its primary strength lies in its ability to foster dialogue, raise awareness, and mobilize global opinion.

The Role and Structure of the UN Security Council

Composition

The UN Security Council is the most powerful body within the United Nations and is primarily responsible for maintaining international peace and security. It consists of 15 members, divided into two categories: 5 permanent members (P5) and 10 non-permanent members.

- The P5 members—the United States, Russia, China, France, and the United Kingdom—hold veto power, which allows any one of these nations to block substantive resolutions, including those related to sanctions, peacekeeping missions, and the use of force. This veto power was established after World War II to ensure that the major powers could prevent actions they deemed contrary to their national interests.
- The remaining 10 non-permanent members are elected by the General Assembly for two-year terms. These members do not have veto power but participate in decision-making and voting on Security Council resolutions. The non-permanent seats are distributed geographically to ensure representation from various regions, including Africa, Asia-Pacific, Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Western Europe/Other.

This structure reflects the post-World War II balance of power and attempts to provide both global representation and recognition of the dominant military and political influence of the P5. However, the permanent members' veto power significantly influences the Security Council's ability to act, often complicating its decision-making in global crises.

Function

The primary responsibility of the Security Council is to maintain international peace and security. It operates continuously, unlike other UN bodies that may meet only periodically, and it can be convened at any time to address crises. The Security Council has the unique authority to:

- Investigate disputes or situations that could lead to international conflict.
- Recommend methods for peaceful resolution of disputes.

- Impose sanctions or other measures to enforce its decisions.
- Authorize peacekeeping operations and the deployment of UN forces to conflict areas.
- Approve military interventions or the use of force when necessary to restore peace and security.

The Security Council is also responsible for overseeing the operations of the UN's peacekeeping forces, ensuring that they are properly equipped, mandated, and funded to carry out their missions in conflict zones around the world. In many cases, the Security Council's resolutions form the basis for international actions aimed at conflict prevention, crisis management, and post-conflict rebuilding efforts.

Powers and Legal Authority

Under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, the Security Council has broad legal authority to take measures, including the use of force, to address threats to international peace and security. This makes it the only UN body capable of passing binding resolutions that member states are legally obligated to implement.

Key powers of the Security Council under Chapter VII include:

1. Sanctions: The Security Council can impose a wide range of sanctions, including economic restrictions, arms embargoes, travel bans, and asset freezes, to compel compliance with its resolutions. These sanctions are often used as a non-violent method of applying pressure on states or groups violating international law or engaging in aggressive behavior.
2. Peacekeeping missions: The Council has the power to authorize the deployment of UN peacekeeping forces to conflict zones to monitor ceasefires, protect civilians, and facilitate the implementation of peace agreements. Peacekeeping operations are vital in stabilizing post-conflict regions and preventing a return to violence.
3. Military intervention: The most significant power of the Security Council is its authority to authorize the use of military force, which it can do under Article 42 of the UN Charter. When diplomacy and sanctions fail, the

Council can approve military action to restore peace. Past examples include the Korean War (1950) and the Gulf War (1991), where Security Council resolutions led to military interventions to repel invasions and restore international order.

The legally binding nature of Security Council resolutions sets it apart from other UN bodies, such as the General Assembly, whose recommendations are non-binding. Once the Security Council adopts a resolution under Chapter VII, all UN member states are required to comply, whether by enforcing sanctions, contributing to peacekeeping operations, or respecting decisions regarding the use of force.

Exclusive Power to Authorize the Use of Force

One of the Security Council's most consequential powers is its exclusive right to authorize the use of force. According to Article 42 of the UN Charter, if peaceful measures such as negotiations or sanctions are insufficient to resolve a threat to peace, the Council can take military action. This authorization can come in various forms, including:

- Approving military intervention to halt aggression or atrocities (e.g., Libya 2011).
- Mandating international coalitions to intervene and restore peace (e.g., Gulf War 1991).
- Authorizing self-defense measures under Article 51, in situations where member states are attacked.

The Security Council's authority to sanction military action ensures that the use of force in international relations is subject to multilateral oversight, providing a framework for collective security. However, this power is often constrained by political dynamics, especially when the interests of permanent members conflict.

Limitations Due to the Veto System and Geopolitical Interests

While the Security Council holds immense power in matters of peace and security, its decision-making process is often hindered by the veto power of the P5. Each of the five permanent members can veto any substantive resolution,

effectively blocking its passage, regardless of how many non-permanent members or the wider international community support the measure.

The veto system was designed to prevent major powers from being forced into actions they strongly oppose, but in practice, it frequently leads to deadlock in situations where the interests of the P5 diverge. For example:

- Russia and China have vetoed multiple resolutions regarding the conflict in Syria, preventing international action against the Syrian government, which they support.
- The United States often uses its veto power to block resolutions critical of Israel in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

This veto power, while ensuring the participation of major global powers in the UN framework, also means that geopolitical interests frequently override the Security Council's ability to act decisively in many conflicts. As a result, critical issues of peace and security are often left unresolved, as the Council can only function when there is consensus or at least abstention among the P5.

The geopolitical interests of the P5 members often play a significant role in the Security Council's decisions. Permanent members may prioritize their national interests or alliances, leading to selective interventions where political or strategic goals align, while other crises are ignored or mishandled. This has led to criticism of the Security Council as an institution that serves the interests of the most powerful countries, rather than the broader international community.

Conclusion

In summary, the UN Security Council wields significant authority in global peace and security matters, with its ability to pass binding resolutions, impose sanctions, and authorize the use of force. However, its effectiveness is often constrained by the veto power of the P5, which can stymie collective action when the interests of the permanent members diverge. While it remains the most powerful international body for conflict resolution, the challenges posed by geopolitical interests and the veto system continue to limit its ability to address certain crises. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for appreciating both the strengths and limitations of the Security Council in maintaining global peace.

The 'Uniting for Peace' Resolution: When the General Assembly Steps In

Historical Context: Adopted in 1950 during the Korean War

The 'Uniting for Peace' resolution, formally known as Resolution 377 A, was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1950 in response to the geopolitical deadlock during the Korean War. At the time, the newly established UN was facing its first major international crisis as North Korean forces, supported by Soviet and Chinese allies, invaded South Korea. The UN Security Council, the body responsible for authorizing collective measures to maintain or restore peace, was paralyzed due to the Soviet Union's use of its veto power, preventing any decisive action against the North Korean aggression.

Recognizing the urgent need for international intervention but hampered by the deadlock in the Security Council, the United States and other allies sought to empower the General Assembly to act in situations where the Security Council was unable to fulfill its responsibilities. The result was Resolution 377 A, which allowed the General Assembly to step in and make recommendations for collective action, including the use of force, in cases where the Security Council was blocked by a veto. This resolution marked a significant shift in the UN's approach to maintaining peace and security, as it provided an alternative mechanism for action when the Security Council was unable or unwilling to act.

The key innovation of the 'Uniting for Peace' resolution was its recognition that the General Assembly, though normally a deliberative body with no binding authority, could play a more proactive role in cases of international crisis. By enabling the Assembly to recommend action in cases of deadlock, the resolution provided a means for the UN to continue functioning even when the Security Council was paralyzed by the competing interests of its permanent members.

Circumstances That Allow the General Assembly to Recommend Collective Measures

The 'Uniting for Peace' resolution outlines specific circumstances under which the General Assembly can step in to make recommendations for collective measures, including the use of force. These circumstances generally involve situations where international peace and security are threatened, and the Security Council is

unable to take action due to the veto power of one or more of its P5 members. Under these conditions, the General Assembly can take the following steps:

1. Emergency Special Sessions: When the Security Council is deadlocked, the General Assembly can convene an emergency special session. This allows member states to come together quickly and discuss measures to restore peace. Emergency sessions can be convened by a two-thirds majority of the Assembly or by the Security Council if at least seven members agree.
2. Non-binding Recommendations: During these special sessions, the General Assembly can adopt recommendations for collective action. These recommendations can include a wide range of measures, such as:
    - Economic sanctions.
    - Arms embargoes.
    - Humanitarian interventions.
    - Military actions to restore peace and security.

While the General Assembly's resolutions under 'Uniting for Peace' are not legally binding, they carry significant political and moral weight. These recommendations can provide international legitimacy for actions taken by member states, regional organizations, or coalitions of the willing. However, it is important to note that these measures are voluntary, meaning that member states are not compelled to implement them.

3. Involvement of Regional Organizations: The General Assembly can also recommend that regional organizations or alliances take action to address the crisis. This has happened in situations where regional actors are better positioned to respond quickly, or where the broader international community is unwilling or unable to intervene directly.

Case Studies

The Korean War (1950)

The first and most significant instance of the 'Uniting for Peace' resolution being invoked was during the Korean War. When North Korea invaded South Korea in June 1950, the UN Security Council initially passed Resolution 82, condemning the

invasion and calling for a ceasefire. However, as the conflict escalated and the need for direct military intervention became clear, the Security Council was unable to pass further resolutions due to the Soviet Union's veto.

In response, the General Assembly invoked the 'Uniting for Peace' resolution and passed Resolution 377 A, recommending that member states provide military assistance to South Korea to repel the North Korean forces. This allowed the creation of a UN-commanded coalition, led by the United States, which intervened militarily in the conflict. The General Assembly's action was unprecedented and marked a critical moment in the UN's history, as it demonstrated the Assembly's ability to step in when the Security Council was deadlocked.

The use of 'Uniting for Peace' during the Korean War highlighted both the potential and the limitations of this mechanism. While it allowed for swift action and international legitimacy for the military intervention, it also exposed the deep geopolitical divisions between the Cold War superpowers, which would continue to shape the Security Council's dynamics for decades.

Limited Modern Use of the Resolution

Since the Korean War, the 'Uniting for Peace' resolution has been invoked sparingly, largely because of the political complexities involved and the tendency of member states to seek Security Council authorization for major interventions. However, it has been used in a few other notable instances:

- Suez Crisis (1956): When the United Kingdom, France, and Israel invaded Egypt in response to President Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal, the Security Council was again deadlocked due to vetoes. The General Assembly stepped in and called for a ceasefire and the withdrawal of foreign troops. This helped pave the way for the deployment of the first UN peacekeeping force, the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF), to monitor the ceasefire and facilitate the withdrawal.
- Hungarian Revolution (1956): The General Assembly invoked the 'Uniting for Peace' resolution during the Hungarian Revolution, condemning the Soviet invasion of Hungary. However, in this case, the resolution had little

effect on the ground, as the Soviet Union ignored the Assembly's recommendations and crushed the revolution.

- More Recent Conflicts: In the 1980s and 1990s, the resolution was invoked during conflicts in the Middle East and Southern Africa, but its use became increasingly rare as the Security Council regained a more active role in conflict resolution following the end of the Cold War.

Recent Calls: Turkish Request for Intervention in Gaza

A recent example of calls for invoking the 'Uniting for Peace' resolution came in 2024, when Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan urged the UN General Assembly to recommend collective measures to stop Israel's military actions in Gaza and Lebanon. As the Security Council was paralyzed by the likely vetoes of the United States and other permanent members, Erdogan called on the General Assembly to convene an emergency special session under the 'Uniting for Peace' framework.

Erdogan's appeal reflected growing frustration with the Security Council's inability to address long-standing conflicts, particularly those involving powerful states or their allies. In this case, Turkey argued that the General Assembly should recommend measures, potentially including military action or sanctions, to protect Palestinian civilians and prevent further escalation in the region. While the General Assembly has not yet acted on this request, it underscores the continuing relevance of the 'Uniting for Peace' resolution as a potential tool for addressing intractable conflicts when the Security Council is deadlocked.

Conclusion

The 'Uniting for Peace' resolution remains a significant, albeit rarely used, mechanism within the UN system. It allows the General Assembly to play a more active role in international peace and security when the Security Council is paralyzed by vetoes, particularly in cases where swift action is needed to prevent widespread violence or aggression. Although the resolution's recommendations are non-binding, they carry important political and moral weight, providing legitimacy for international action in situations where the Security Council is unable to act.

However, the use of 'Uniting for Peace' has been limited in modern times, and its effectiveness depends on the willingness of member states to follow through on its recommendations. In an increasingly polarized global environment, the resolution remains a valuable tool, but one whose application must navigate the complex realities of international politics and power dynamics.

Key Differences Between the General Assembly and the Security Council

Authority: Binding vs. Non-binding Decisions

One of the most fundamental differences between the UN General Assembly and the UN Security Council is the nature of their decision-making authority. The Security Council has the power to pass binding resolutions under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which member states are legally obligated to implement. These binding resolutions can mandate sanctions, establish peacekeeping missions, or authorize the use of force, among other actions. As a result, the Security Council holds a unique position within the UN framework as the only body with the legal authority to enforce its decisions on all UN member states.

In contrast, the General Assembly's resolutions are non-binding, meaning that they serve as recommendations rather than obligations. While the General Assembly plays a crucial role in diplomacy and global consensus-building, its decisions do not carry the weight of law and cannot compel member states to take specific actions. The Assembly's resolutions often reflect the collective opinion of the international community, particularly on issues like human rights, development, and peace, but they lack enforcement mechanisms. This limitation means that while the General Assembly can influence global opinion and pressure states diplomatically, it does not have the legal authority to enforce its decisions as the Security Council does.

Scope of Power: Security Council's Legal Enforcement Capabilities vs. the General Assembly's Role as a Diplomatic Forum

The Security Council is the primary body tasked with maintaining international peace and security, and it possesses legal enforcement capabilities under the UN Charter. This means that when the Security Council determines that a threat to peace, breach of peace, or act of aggression exists, it can take direct action to

address the situation. The Security Council's decisions can result in concrete measures such as economic sanctions, diplomatic pressure, and, if necessary, military intervention. The Council can also authorize the creation of UN peacekeeping operations, which play a crucial role in managing conflicts and stabilizing post-conflict regions. Importantly, the Security Council's decisions are legally binding on all member states, meaning that countries must comply with its resolutions.

In contrast, the General Assembly serves as a global diplomatic forum where all member states can participate in discussions on a wide range of issues, including peace, security, development, and human rights. While the Assembly is responsible for shaping the broader policy agenda of the UN and fostering international cooperation, its scope of power is limited to deliberation and recommendation. It cannot enforce its decisions or compel states to take specific actions. However, the General Assembly does have the power to convene emergency special sessions under the 'Uniting for Peace' resolution, where it can make recommendations for collective measures in cases where the Security Council is deadlocked. Even in such situations, the General Assembly's actions remain advisory, reflecting its primary role as a diplomatic rather than an enforcement body.

Use of Force: Security Council's Exclusive Right to Authorize Force vs. General Assembly's Advisory Role

One of the most critical distinctions between the two bodies is the Security Council's exclusive right to authorize the use of force. Under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, the Security Council has the power to determine when the use of force is necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security. This authority allows the Council to authorize military interventions, no-fly zones, and other coercive measures that require the deployment of military assets. For example, the Security Council authorized the use of force during the Gulf War (1991) to expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait, and again in Libya (2011) to protect civilians during the civil war.

The General Assembly, on the other hand, lacks the legal authority to authorize the use of force. While it can recommend collective action under the 'Uniting for Peace' resolution, these recommendations are non-binding and depend on the

willingness of individual member states or coalitions to act on them. The General Assembly can suggest measures such as sanctions or military assistance, but it cannot compel member states to intervene militarily. The Assembly's role in conflict situations is thus primarily advisory, aimed at building international consensus and encouraging diplomatic or non-military solutions where possible.

Veto Power: Security Council's Permanent Members vs. General Assembly's Majority Voting

A significant difference between the Security Council and the General Assembly lies in the veto power held by the permanent members (P5) of the Security Council: the United States, Russia, China, France, and the United Kingdom. The veto system allows any of the P5 members to block substantive resolutions, including those related to military action, peacekeeping missions, and sanctions. This power gives the permanent members disproportionate influence over the Council's decision-making process. For example, the Russian and Chinese vetoes have frequently blocked resolutions related to the Syrian civil war, preventing the Security Council from taking strong action against the Syrian government. Similarly, the United States has used its veto to block resolutions critical of Israel in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The veto system reflects the realities of global power dynamics, but it also leads to deadlock in situations where the P5 members' interests conflict. As a result, the Security Council is often unable to act decisively in conflicts where one or more permanent members have geopolitical interests at stake.

In contrast, the General Assembly operates under a system of majority voting, where each member state has one vote, and decisions are typically made by a simple or two-thirds majority. The Assembly's democratic structure ensures that no single country or group of countries can unilaterally block decisions. However, because the Assembly's resolutions are non-binding, the absence of a veto power does not translate into enforcement authority. While the General Assembly can express broad international support for certain measures, its resolutions cannot compel action, and their effectiveness relies on the political will of member states to implement them.

Conclusion

In summary, the UN Security Council and General Assembly serve distinct yet complementary roles within the United Nations system. The Security Council's binding authority, legal enforcement powers, and exclusive right to authorize the use of force make it the most powerful body for addressing international peace and security. However, its effectiveness is often limited by the veto power of its permanent members, which can block action on critical issues. The General Assembly, while lacking enforcement authority, plays a crucial role in diplomacy, consensus-building, and offering recommendations through a more inclusive and democratic process. Together, these two bodies form the core of the UN's efforts to maintain global peace, though their effectiveness in modern conflicts often depends on overcoming the political divisions within the international community.

Impact of These Differences on Global Conflicts

The structural differences between the UN Security Council and the UN General Assembly have significant implications for how the United Nations can respond to global conflicts. While the Security Council possesses the legal authority to take binding actions, such as the use of force, the exercise of veto power by its permanent members often impedes its ability to act decisively. Meanwhile, the General Assembly, although more democratic and inclusive, lacks enforcement power, limiting its capacity to respond effectively to crises. This dynamic profoundly affects the UN's ability to address ongoing conflicts, as well as the success and failure of its interventions.

The Implications for Ongoing Conflicts Where Security Council Vetoes Prevent Action

One of the most striking consequences of the veto power held by the five permanent members (P5) of the Security Council is the paralysis it can induce in situations where quick and decisive action is required. When the P5 members' geopolitical interests are at odds, the veto system effectively blocks the Security Council from passing resolutions, including those related to sanctions,

peacekeeping, or military intervention. This deadlock has been most apparent in high-profile, ongoing conflicts such as those in Syria and Gaza.

- Syria: The Syrian Civil War, which began in 2011, has been one of the most significant examples of the limitations imposed by the Security Council's veto system. Throughout the conflict, Russia—a staunch ally of the Syrian government—has used its veto numerous times to block resolutions that would impose sanctions on the regime of Bashar al-Assad, initiate investigations into chemical weapon attacks, or authorize military interventions. China has often sided with Russia in these vetoes, reflecting a broader alignment of interests. As a result, the Security Council has been largely ineffective in addressing one of the most brutal conflicts of the 21st century, despite widespread international condemnation of the Assad regime's actions. The use of vetoes in this context has prevented not only punitive measures against the Syrian government but also broader peacekeeping or humanitarian missions that might have mitigated the conflict's toll.
- Gaza: The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and specifically the situation in Gaza, has also been a flashpoint for vetoes within the Security Council. The United States, a key ally of Israel, has repeatedly used its veto power to block resolutions critical of Israel's military actions in Gaza or broader occupation policies. For instance, in 2018, the U.S. vetoed a resolution calling for the protection of Palestinians in Gaza following a series of deadly protests. This pattern of veto use has prevented the Security Council from addressing the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, and from taking action that might pressure Israel to alter its policies or engage in peace negotiations. Consequently, the deadlock over Gaza in the Security Council has prolonged the conflict, as it remains insulated from strong international sanctions or other coercive measures that might influence a settlement.

These examples demonstrate how Security Council vetoes often prevent the international community from acting on widely supported peace initiatives or measures to protect civilians. When powerful states with vested interests in a conflict use their veto power, the Security Council's paralysis has a direct impact

on the lives of those in conflict zones, allowing wars to drag on and humanitarian crises to worsen.

Examples of Successful vs. Unsuccessful Interventions

While the UN has experienced significant deadlock in some conflicts due to vetoes, there have also been cases where the Security Council successfully intervened, either by authorizing the use of force or imposing sanctions that contributed to peace. Conversely, there have been other instances where the UN's intervention efforts were unsuccessful, often due to structural limitations or political opposition.

- Successful Interventions:
    - The Gulf War (1991): One of the most prominent successes of the Security Council was its response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. After diplomatic efforts failed, the Security Council passed Resolution 678, authorizing member states to use "all necessary means" to expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait. This led to the formation of a US-led international coalition, which launched Operation Desert Storm in early 1991. The military intervention was swift and successful, restoring Kuwait's sovereignty and demonstrating the Security Council's ability to respond effectively when international consensus is reached.
    - East Timor (1999): After a long and violent struggle for independence from Indonesia, the Security Council authorized the deployment of a UN peacekeeping force to stabilize the situation in East Timor. The UN Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) played a critical role in overseeing the country's transition to independence, contributing to a peaceful resolution and setting up a functioning government. The mission was widely regarded as a success, showcasing the Security Council's capacity to assist post-conflict nation-building when geopolitical interests align.
- Unsuccessful Interventions:
    - Rwanda (1994): The failure of the UN to prevent the Rwandan Genocide is one of the most tragic examples of its limitations.

Despite early warnings about the impending genocide, the UN peacekeeping mission (UNAMIR) was not given the mandate or resources to intervene effectively. As a result, an estimated 800,000 people were killed in a matter of weeks. The Security Council's inaction, in part due to the reluctance of member states to commit troops and resources, highlighted the tragic consequences of political unwillingness to intervene, even when there is a clear moral imperative.

- Bosnia (1992-1995): During the Bosnian War, the UN struggled to protect civilians and prevent atrocities, most notably during the Srebrenica massacre in 1995, where over 8,000 Bosniaks were killed by Bosnian Serb forces in a UN-designated "safe area." The UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR) was ill-equipped and undermanned, and the Security Council failed to take decisive action to prevent the massacre. The situation in Bosnia demonstrated the UN's inability to act effectively when confronted with complex, fast-moving conflicts, especially when member states were hesitant to fully support military intervention.

These examples illustrate the contrast between successful and unsuccessful interventions, often determined by whether or not the Security Council could achieve consensus and the willingness of member states to commit resources and troops.

The Political and Diplomatic Limitations Imposed by These Differences

The structural differences between the Security Council and the General Assembly not only define their respective powers but also impose significant political and diplomatic limitations on the UN's ability to act decisively in global conflicts. The Security Council's veto power, while designed to ensure that the world's major powers are engaged in peace and security efforts, often leads to paralysis when their interests diverge. This creates a situation where regional conflicts or humanitarian crises become protracted as the international community is unable to take collective action.

1. Geopolitical Rivalries: The interests of the P5 members frequently conflict, especially in regions where they have strategic allies or economic interests.

This often leads to vetoes that block Security Council resolutions aimed at stopping violence or imposing sanctions. The result is a form of geopolitical gridlock, where no progress is made in resolving conflicts like those in Syria, Ukraine, or Yemen.

2. Non-binding Nature of General Assembly Resolutions: The General Assembly, while inclusive and democratic, lacks the enforcement power necessary to compel states to act. Its resolutions are non-binding, and while they can serve as moral or political guidance, they rarely result in concrete action. For instance, the General Assembly can pass resolutions condemning human rights abuses or calling for ceasefires, but without the Security Council's authority to impose sanctions or authorize military force, these recommendations often go unheeded.
3. Selective Interventions: The Security Council's interventions are often selective, based on where geopolitical consensus can be reached. In regions where the interests of the P5 members align, such as in East Timor or the Gulf War, the UN can act decisively. However, in areas where those interests conflict, such as Syria or Gaza, the Security Council remains deadlocked, leading to prolonged conflicts and humanitarian suffering.

In summary, the political and diplomatic limitations imposed by the differences between the Security Council and the General Assembly have a profound impact on global conflicts. While the Security Council has the legal authority to act decisively, its veto system often prevents meaningful action, particularly in situations where major powers have conflicting interests. The General Assembly, while capable of building international consensus, lacks the enforcement mechanisms needed to translate recommendations into action. This dynamic creates a complex environment in which the UN's ability to prevent and resolve conflicts is often constrained, leaving many crises unresolved or prolonged due to political deadlock.

Recent Controversies and Debates

Case Study: Turkey's 2024 Call for the General Assembly to Recommend the Use of Force Against Israel in Gaza

One of the most recent and highly debated instances of the UN's structural limitations is Turkey's 2024 call for the General Assembly to recommend the use of force against Israel in response to its military actions in Gaza. This case underscores the ongoing tension between the UN Security Council's veto powers and the General Assembly's more inclusive but non-binding authority.

As the conflict in Gaza escalated in 2024, with Israel conducting extensive military operations that led to significant casualties and infrastructure destruction in both Gaza and Lebanon, the Security Council once again found itself at an impasse. The United States, a close ally of Israel and a permanent member of the Security Council, was expected to veto any resolution condemning Israel's actions or calling for military intervention. Frustrated by the inability of the Security Council to act, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan turned to the UN General Assembly, invoking the 'Uniting for Peace' resolution and calling for the Assembly to recommend collective measures, including the potential use of force, to protect Palestinian civilians and end Israel's military campaign.

Erdogan's appeal echoed a growing sentiment among many UN member states that the veto power exercised by the P5 members, particularly the United States, was preventing the UN from taking decisive action in one of the world's longest-standing and most contentious conflicts. Turkey's request highlighted the deep divisions within the international community over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and brought to the forefront the limitations of the General Assembly as a vehicle for addressing such crises.

While the General Assembly has the power to convene an emergency special session under the Uniting for Peace resolution, any recommendations it makes for the use of force would be non-binding, meaning that they would rely on individual states or coalitions to act on them voluntarily. This limitation sparked a heated debate within the international community. On one hand, proponents of Turkey's call argued that the General Assembly was the only available forum for addressing the situation, given the Security Council's deadlock. On the other hand, critics contended that the General Assembly's lack of enforcement power made such

recommendations largely symbolic and unlikely to result in meaningful change on the ground.

Discussion on Whether the Current Structure Hinders or Helps in Resolving Modern Conflicts

The UN's structural design, with its division of power between the Security Council and the General Assembly, has been the subject of significant debate in recent years, particularly in the context of modern conflicts. As global challenges become more complex and politically charged, the limitations of the current system have become more apparent.

One of the key criticisms of the UN's structure is that the Security Council's veto power frequently hinders its ability to take decisive action in conflicts where the P5 members' interests conflict. The Syrian Civil War, the Israel-Palestine conflict, and the Ukraine crisis are prime examples of situations where vetoes by the permanent members—particularly Russia, China, and the United States—have prevented the Security Council from passing resolutions that could lead to peace or intervention. This has led to frustration among the majority of UN member states, who feel that the Security Council is out of touch with modern realities and beholden to the political agendas of a few powerful countries.

In contrast, the General Assembly provides a more inclusive platform, where every member state has a vote and can participate in decision-making. The Assembly's ability to pass resolutions that reflect the will of the majority of the international community gives it moral authority, particularly in situations where the Security Council is deadlocked. For instance, the General Assembly has repeatedly passed resolutions condemning human rights abuses and calling for action in conflicts where the Security Council has failed to act. However, because these resolutions are non-binding, the General Assembly's role in resolving conflicts is often viewed as limited to symbolic gestures rather than concrete actions.

The question, then, is whether the current structure helps or hinders the UN's ability to resolve modern conflicts. While the Security Council's veto power is intended to ensure that major powers cooperate on matters of international peace and security, in practice, it often results in inaction when the P5 members' interests clash. This has led to protracted conflicts, where the lack of decisive

action exacerbates humanitarian crises and allows violence to continue unchecked.

On the other hand, while the General Assembly is more democratic, its lack of legal enforcement power limits its ability to bring about tangible change. Many argue that the non-binding nature of its resolutions means that it can only play a supporting role in conflict resolution, serving as a forum for debate and consensus-building but not as a body that can implement effective solutions.

Debate on Potential Reforms: The Role of the Veto and Calls for More General Assembly Power

In response to the limitations posed by the Security Council's veto system, there have been growing calls for reform. One of the most discussed potential reforms involves curbing or eliminating the veto power of the P5 members. Proponents of veto reform argue that the veto system is outdated, reflecting the geopolitical realities of 1945 rather than the modern world. They contend that the veto allows a small number of powerful countries to block action on issues where there is widespread international support for intervention, effectively undermining the UN's mission to maintain peace and security.

Several reform proposals have been floated over the years, including:

1. Limiting the Use of the Veto: One common proposal is to limit the use of the veto in situations involving mass atrocities, such as genocide or crimes against humanity. Under this proposal, the P5 members would be prohibited from vetoing resolutions aimed at preventing or stopping such atrocities, ensuring that the Security Council could act in the most critical humanitarian crises.
2. Expanding the Security Council: Another proposed reform is to expand the Security Council to include more permanent members or rotating members from other regions of the world. This would make the Council more representative of the modern geopolitical landscape and could dilute the influence of the current P5 members. Proponents argue that this would make the Council more effective at addressing conflicts in regions where the current permanent members have less direct involvement.

3. Suspension of Veto Power: Some have suggested the suspension of veto power when the Security Council is dealing with issues that have overwhelming support from the international community. For example, a resolution supported by more than two-thirds of the General Assembly might override the veto, allowing the Council to take action even when a P5 member objects.

At the same time, there have been calls for enhancing the power of the General Assembly. Critics of the current system argue that the General Assembly's lack of binding authority prevents it from playing a more meaningful role in conflict resolution. Some have suggested reforms that would give the Assembly greater influence over decisions related to international peace and security, particularly in cases where the Security Council is deadlocked. For example, the 'Uniting for Peace' resolution could be strengthened to allow the General Assembly to take more decisive action when the Security Council fails to act, potentially including the ability to authorize humanitarian interventions or peacekeeping missions.

However, such reforms face significant challenges, particularly from the P5 members, who are unlikely to relinquish their veto power or allow the General Assembly to assume greater responsibility in conflict resolution. The P5 view their veto as a guarantee that their core interests will be protected within the UN framework, and any attempt to weaken this power would likely be met with resistance. Moreover, there are concerns that giving the General Assembly more power could lead to uncoordinated actions by member states, as the Assembly's resolutions are not legally binding and do not come with the same enforcement mechanisms as those of the Security Council.

Conclusion

The debate over the structural differences between the UN Security Council and the General Assembly, particularly the veto power and the non-binding nature of Assembly resolutions, continues to shape discussions about the future of the United Nations. As seen in the 2024 Gaza crisis, where Turkey's call for General Assembly action was a response to the Security Council's paralysis, these structural issues have real-world consequences for the UN's ability to address conflicts and prevent humanitarian disasters. While there is widespread recognition of the need for reform, the political and institutional barriers to

change remain formidable, leaving the UN's ability to act in modern conflicts constrained by its founding structure.

Conclusion

The United Nations, through its two primary organs—the General Assembly and the Security Council—remains the world's foremost institution for promoting international peace and security. Each body plays a crucial role in maintaining global order, yet their differing structures, mandates, and powers have significant implications for the UN's effectiveness in addressing contemporary conflicts. While the Security Council wields legal authority to enforce binding resolutions, including the use of military force, the General Assembly serves as a broader forum for global diplomacy and consensus-building, albeit without the capacity to compel member states to take action.

The importance of both bodies cannot be overstated. The Security Council has the ability to take decisive action in times of crisis, overseeing peacekeeping missions, imposing sanctions, and authorizing military interventions when necessary. Its power to issue binding resolutions ensures that member states comply with decisions aimed at restoring or maintaining peace. On the other hand, the General Assembly represents the collective voice of the international community, offering a platform where all 193 member states have an equal say in global matters. Through its resolutions and deliberations, the General Assembly shapes the global agenda, promotes international cooperation, and raises awareness of critical issues, such as human rights, climate change, and disarmament.

However, both bodies face significant strengths and limitations in their roles. The Security Council, while possessing enforcement power, is often hamstrung by vetoes from its five permanent members (P5)—the United States, Russia, China, France, and the United Kingdom. This has led to deadlock on critical issues, with conflicts like those in Syria and Gaza persisting for years due to the competing interests of these major powers. The veto system, designed to ensure that no major power is forced into action against its will, often results in paralysis, even in situations where there is broad international consensus for intervention.

Conversely, the General Assembly enjoys greater inclusivity and representation, offering a platform where all countries, regardless of size or influence, can participate in shaping global policy. Its recommendations and resolutions carry significant moral and political weight, especially when they reflect the will of a large majority of member states. However, the General Assembly's decisions are non-binding, meaning that they lack the enforcement mechanisms necessary to ensure compliance. This makes the Assembly a valuable forum for diplomatic engagement, but one that is often viewed as limited in its ability to effect concrete change in situations of war or conflict.

Recommendations for Balancing Their Roles in Light of Evolving Geopolitical Challenges

In light of the evolving geopolitical landscape, there are several recommendations for balancing the roles of the Security Council and General Assembly to ensure the UN remains effective in its peacekeeping efforts.

1. Reform the Veto System: One of the most widely discussed reforms is to limit the use of veto power in the Security Council, particularly in cases involving mass atrocities, such as genocide or war crimes. Implementing a rule that would prevent P5 members from using their veto when there is overwhelming evidence of humanitarian crises could help unblock the Security Council in times of moral imperative. This would ensure that the UN can act in situations where swift intervention is critical to saving lives, without being hindered by geopolitical interests.
2. Strengthen the Role of the General Assembly: While the General Assembly's resolutions are non-binding, there are ways to increase its influence in global peace efforts. Expanding the 'Uniting for Peace' resolution to allow the General Assembly to take more decisive action in deadlocked situations could be a way forward. For example, giving the General Assembly greater authority to recommend humanitarian interventions, or to convene emergency sessions more frequently when the Security Council is paralyzed, could enhance its ability to respond to crises. While such reforms would not grant the Assembly the same enforcement powers as the Security Council, they would provide it with a more active role in conflict resolution.

3. Encourage Regional Solutions: The UN could also leverage regional organizations more effectively to complement its peacekeeping efforts. When the Security Council is unable to act, regional bodies such as the African Union or the European Union can play a critical role in addressing conflicts within their spheres of influence. By providing logistical, political, and financial support to these regional actors, the UN could enhance its overall capacity to respond to conflicts, even when the Security Council is deadlocked.
4. Expand Security Council Membership: Another long-debated reform is to expand the membership of the Security Council, including the possibility of adding new permanent members from regions that are currently underrepresented, such as Africa, Latin America, or Asia. This would make the Council more reflective of the modern geopolitical order and could reduce the over-concentration of power in the hands of the existing P5. An expanded Council might also lead to more diverse perspectives on global security challenges and could help dilute the influence of a single veto.

Reflection on the Necessity of Reforms to Strengthen Global Peacekeeping Efforts

As global conflicts become more complex and multifaceted, reform of the UN system is increasingly seen as essential to ensuring the organization's ability to respond effectively to modern challenges. The limitations of the Security Council's veto system and the General Assembly's lack of enforcement power are becoming more pronounced as new conflicts emerge and old ones remain unresolved. To strengthen global peacekeeping efforts, the UN must adapt to the changing nature of international politics.

Reforming the veto power and enhancing the role of the General Assembly are necessary steps to ensure that the UN can act decisively in times of crisis. Without these changes, the world risks continued paralysis in the face of urgent conflicts, leaving millions vulnerable to the effects of war, displacement, and human rights abuses.

The UN's founding principles of collective security and peace remain as relevant today as they were in 1945, but the structures designed to uphold these principles must evolve to meet the demands of a rapidly changing world. Whether through reforming the veto, expanding the Security Council, or strengthening the

General Assembly, the international community must come together to ensure that the UN remains an effective guardian of global peace and security in the decades to come.

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This reference section includes key documents, academic articles, and policy papers relevant to the discussion of the UN General Assembly, Security Council, and their respective roles in global peacekeeping. The sources reflect historical and contemporary perspectives on UN reform, veto power, and conflict resolution mechanisms.